



# News Release

**For immediate release:** September 9, 2009

(09-144)

Contacts: [Carolyn Cox](#), Office of Drinking Water  
[Gordon MacCracken](#), Communications Office

360-236-3162  
360-236-4072

## **Small water systems have more than their share of big problems**

*Agency proposes remedies aimed at preventing costly failures, fixes*

**OLYMPIA** — Because small water systems in Washington are more likely than large ones to fail, the state Department of Health is recommending a series of changes aimed at preventing small systems from coming up short.

State legislators requested the recommendations because of concerns about the number of small water systems that are failing. Since 2003, the Legislature has appropriated more than \$18 million to address urgent health threats posed by small water systems that serve fewer than 1,000 connections.

In 2008, small systems accounted for the vast majority of violations for failure to properly test their drinking water to ensure its safety.

“The reality is that smaller water systems are less likely than larger ones to routinely test the quality of their water or make timely repairs and needed improvements,” said Denise Clifford, director of the agency’s Office of Drinking Water. “Often, the reason is a lack of commitment by the owner, governing board, or customers to invest money in the system to ensure safe water at the tap.”

To address these problems, the agency is recommending changes in four broad areas:

- Reduce the growth of small public water systems by requiring developers to request service from an existing utility that serves the area rather than establish a new water system.

--More--

- Require that new water systems serving 25 or more people be owned by a professional water system management company or a public entity, such as a water district. Both ownership models would support improved public health protection and long-term financial viability.
- Improve oversight of water systems' financial viability and provide technical assistance on rate-setting and financial planning where problems exist.
- Strengthen the existing legal framework for addressing failing water systems.

“A significant number of small systems have technical, managerial, and financial challenges,” Clifford said. “We’re confident that these changes, if enacted, will help prevent water systems from failing and position new systems to deliver safe and reliable drinking water to their customers.”

The [complete report](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/Publications/331-437.pdf) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/Publications/331-437.pdf>) is available on the department’s Web site.

###

*Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.*